

Sinclair Broadcasting's decision to force their stations to air an anti-Kerry documentary days before the election is a clear example of the dangers of media consolidation.

Our country's broadcasters have a long history of not showing propaganda for any candidate, no matter how much a station owner may personally favor one or dislike the other. Broadcasters should understand that they have a special and conditional role in public discourse. They received their licenses from the public -- licenses to use airwaves that, for instance, cellular companies bought in auctions -- for free, and one condition is the obligation to help us hold a fair and free election. The Supreme Court has routinely upheld this "public interest" obligation. Virtually all broadcasters understand and honor it.

Sinclair has a different idea, and a wrong one in my view. If Sinclair wants to disseminate propaganda, it should buy a printing press, or create a web site. These other media have no conditions on their publication of points of view. This is the law, and it should be honored.

Sinclair uses the public airwaves free of charge, and is obligated by law to serve the public interest. But when large companies control the airwaves, we get more of what's good for the bottom line and less of what we need for our democracy. Instead of something produced at "News Central" far away, it's more important that we see real people from our own communities and more substantive news about issues that matter.

Sinclair's actions show why we need to strengthen media ownership rules, not weaken them. They show why the license renewal process needs to involve more than a returned postcard. Thank you.